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ABSTRACT

The implications of cultural pluralism for teachers are enormous and largely unstated and unanalyzed. The elements of demographic change that challenge the nation include the influx of new populations, the cultural diversity among native-born groups, and the growth of minority populations especially in major and secondary urban centers and among younger population cohorts. For American education, meeting the challenge of cultural diversity involves: (1) efforts to reverse the trend toward homogeneity among teaching staffs to ensure that teachers reflect the growing diversity of students; (2) development of teacher education programs that prepare teachers to deal with students with a variety of language bases, value systems, and learning styles; (3) emphasis on second language learning in the elementary/secondary curriculum; (4) development of student assessment efforts that define strengths as well as weaknesses; (5) understanding of cultural determinants of cognitive style; and (6) the creation of learning environments that are supportive and responsive to very different individuals. Educators will have to analyze the implications of cultural pluralism with more realism and candor to find the educational path that will promote the cohesiveness and literacy of the nation. (RO)

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THE NEW IMMIGRANTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

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The New Immigrants: Implications for Educators

I wish to thank the National Catholic Education Association for the kind invitation to address you today. Compliments are due to the Association as well, for their sensitivity in including the issue of cultural pluralism on the program. This may be a key educational issue over the next two decades and beyond. Yet it is a reality that may or may not ever be addressed openly. To date, the growing cultural diversity in our schools has not been analyzed, addressed or confronted.

While we often refer to demographic change as a concern for the year 2000 and beyond, it is already a fait accompli. The elements of that change are so complex as to defy easy definition or simplistic solution. Immigration comes to mind as the catalyst, but this is only one facet of the change we are experiencing. There is cultural pluralism among our native-born populations as well. The influx of new populations, nevertheless, is significant. The numbers entering the United States today rival the historic peaks of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. While today's immigrants come for the same economic motivations, they are infinitely more diverse than earlier immigrants who came primarily from Europe. Today's immigrants are a rainbow of races, cultures, languages and value systems from East and South Asia, the Pacific Isles, the Caribbean, Central and South America, the Middle East and Africa. They represent a continuation of the challenge this nation has faced to build a single nation out of many peoples.

As noted earlier, there is diversity among our native-born as well. Our urban underclass, isolated from our economic, social and political mainstreams, has a totally divergent set of values, assumptions and realities. The challenge of bringing these populations into the larger society can be as great as any effort to absorb the immigrant.

The impact of demographic change is already being felt. The term "minority," for example, may soon become passe. "Minorities" now comprise the "majority" population in 38 of the 50 largest public school systems in the United States. This might have been anticipated in our major urban centers: New York, San Francisco, Chicago or Atlanta; but the same pattern is found in secondary cities as well, so that Paterson, New Jersey, Lorain, Ohio, Buffalo, New York, Fort Worth, Texas and Milwaukee, Wisconsin are among the cities with black and/or hispanic student majorities in their public schools. In Los Angeles, 68% of the students between kindergarten and sixth grade are hispanic. It must be stressed that neither the "minorities" nor the "immigrants" are homogeneous. Thus a "hispanic" population can include varying elements of

Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Central and South Americans. Each brings nuances of culture to the classroom. There is similar distinctiveness among all of the groups served. Thus when we speak of "diversity," we must recognize that our country has matured beyond the "easy" stereotypes and convenient labels. Our educational setting now demands careful analysis and a sophisticated level of understanding.

Why have minority populations grown? Is the flight of white populations causing the isolation? Ethnic polarization remains a reality in America, but this is not the cause of demographic change. White middle-class Americans have reached zero population growth and have acclimated to the two-income family. Minorities and immigrants have not. Thus the latter groups have higher birth rates and reveal much younger median ages within their populations. In some instances, the population growth is only beginning. By 1990, minorities will comprise 25% of the U.S. population, but 35% of the youth cohorts. Thus the effective education of minority and immigrant youth is vital for the United States. These young people represent a significant share of our future manpower pool.

One might assume that language instruction is critical. This is true for the recent immigrant, but beyond this discrete group we find needs for basic language and computational skills not too different from those of the general population. In Miami, among five to seventeen year old Hispanic youth, it has been found that 65% speak some Spanish, but 84% speak English. American education is confronting cultural pluralism of a greater magnitude than ever before. The stakes on success are higher for the nation than in the past. We can no longer afford to leave whole populations behind. The answers will come neither with facile generalizations nor a narrow focus on language. We will have to assure that our entire educational process is able to respond to the needs which are becoming more evident as each year passes.

Are we now prepared to address these needs? Who will comprise the next generation of teachers? Ideally, our teaching staffs should now be beginning to reflect the growing diversity of our students. There is no evidence to support the thesis that teachers of one ethnic or cultural group cannot teach students of another effectively. But some symbiosis with students remains important. Representation of a group on a teaching staff can enhance that staff's sensitivity to the cultural nuances the students bring. All available evidence indicates that role models are vital for student achievement. In a recent report from the National Center for Education entitled The Condition of Education for Hispanic Americans, it was noted that:

> "While there is no evidence to indicate that majority teachers are unable to teach minority children....majority teachers (do) sometimes hold negative attitudes toward minority children and that teacher's expectations can affect student achievement. In addition, teachers and other staff may provide role models...."

There is every indication that our cadre of teachers is moving away from rather than toward greater diversity. In fact, we are on the threshold of a teacher shortage paralleling that of the 1960's. Acute shortages are already being felt in urban centers and in science and mathematics. By 1990, the shortage will encompass the entire profession. The shortage of minority teachers is already acute, and it should reach embarrassing proportions by 1990. The fact that Black and Hispanic students are already underrepresented in higher education and that these groups suffer the highest levels of attrition from college assures this. In the entire State of Colorado, only 94 Master of Arts degrees were awarded to Hispanics in 1980. This figure represented a nine percent decline from awards made in 1976. In Fairfax County, Virginia, there are 55 languages represented among the students in public schools. Meanwhile, Federal bilingual programs serve 210,000 of the 1.5 million eligible. These programs are being crippled by controversy based on emotional and political issues, that obscure their utility as an educational technique. Thus, there is every indication that public education is drifting in two contradictory directions. The teaching staff is becoming more homogeneous while the student population grows more complex and diverse. The implications are evident.

Even before we begin to solve the manpower shortage in teaching, it will be necessary to attune the education of teachers to the realities they will face. Diversity means that teachers will need a level of comfort with and tolerance for a very different environment in the classroom. They are facing classes whose students have a variety of language bases. The presence of a variety of cultures means that the teachers are coping with varied value systems and, most important of all, learning styles.

How can this complexity best be approached? An Indian proverb gives us a clue: "One must never judge another man until you have walked a mile in his moccasions." C.E.S. Miller in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (1979) puts this into a scholarly context in developing the principle of cultural relativism. Here, it is stressed that one must "....attempt to understand other cultural systems in their own terms, not in terms of one's own cultural beliefs." Tragically, this is precisely what most Americans are least prepared to do. The tone and hysteria of our current reactions to bilingual education and to the appearance of foreign languages in our cities can be indicative of a linguistic arrogance that can complicate efforts to achieve solutions to the problems we face. In 1978, the report of the Presidential Commission on Foreign Languages and Foreign Area Study stressed that our national pattern of incompetence in the mastery of foreign languages constituted a threat to our national security and commercial leadership. There has been no coherent effort to address this serious issue. Americans are further handicapped in attempting to address our own diversity, because we live in relative isolation from other Americans of other races and cultures. Our history documents this polarization. Global change makes this a luxury we can no longer afford if our world position is to be maintained, and if we are to meld one people from the next generation of diversity as effectively as in the past. Finally, Americans have not always been sensitive to the strengths and values of other

cultures. Thus we have tended to miss the strengths students of other cultures add to our classrooms. For example, there has been little scholarly notice of the fact that the Mexican-American family structure is the most viable and enduring in the United States. This is a tremendously strong base on which to build the education of youth. Most teachers will assert that the weakening of the family is one cause of poor student performance. Thus one must ask why over 60% of Mexican-American youth fail to complete high school.

The increasing diversity of our youth challenges the teacher with a proliferation of learning styles in each classroom. Existing teacher education programs do not prepare the teacher to analyze, comprehend and cope with these learning styles. This is contributing to increasing frustration of veteran teachers, disenchantment among younger teachers and an increasing exodus from the profession. Student diversity demands analysis that is sophisticated enough to define both strengths and weaknesses. To date, our student assessment efforts have taken a pathological approach, focusing only on weaknesses. Thus we are confusing deficiencies in skills with levels of learning potential and intelligence. We are overlooking strengths on which education can progress while skills are developed.

Effective cross-cultural teaching depends on sensitivity to cognitive style. This is based on the theory of linguistic relativity proposed by Kurt Wilhelm in the 19th Century and expanded by Karl Wilhelm and Benjamin Whorf in recent times. The basic premise of linguistic relativity is that the structure of one's language determines the structure and process of one's thought. Alfred North Whitehead touched upon this in his Principia Mathematica, when he stressed that a culture expresses its planted axioms or assumptions in its mode of analysis. "Anglo" culture, for example, is achievement oriented. Thus analyses by this group will be through approaches structured with exclusive reference with what is perceived to be the subject at hand. Japanese and Hispanic cultures, for example, might include a much broader scope of references. In 1981, M.R. Ramirez and A. Castaneda in Cultural Democracy, Bicognitive Development and Education noted that:

> "....Intellectual patterns are due to culturally determined learning styles: modes of organizing, classifying and assimilating info about the environment which are unique to each cultural group."

Cognitive styles, according to Wilhelm and Whorf will fall essentially into two categories, field senstive and field independent. The former style enables one to see overall organization. Students with this cognitive style will score higher on verbal than non-verbal tests. They may learn best from social situations and from materials based upon fantasy and humor. Such children may also need positive reinforcement to function most effectively. Students with a field independent cognitive style will see elements as discrete from their background. They will do best on non-verbal rather than verbal tests and on analytical tasks. Their learning can be drawn in an impersonal context and they can function independently of any surrounding reinforcement.

Dr. Hyunh Dinh Te recently expanded upon the work of Wilhelm and Whorf to assert that there are more than two cognitive styles, and that a very distinct style can be mapped for each culture. The cognitive style, he proposes, can be deduced from the paragraph structure of each language. The English speaker, he notes, is linear in thought, an analysis that supports Whitehead's thesis. The Arabic speaker is given to parallel structures filled with redundancy, comparisons and contrasts. The Asian languages tend to offer a whirlpool of ideas with evidence of a clear thesis that is implicit, but may not necessarily be stated. America's teachers may face an even more formidable task than might be offered by clearly defined but diverse learning needs. The youth we teach may well be in transition from a native to an English cognitive style. Others may internalize dual styles and apply each as appropriate. Cognitive style is independent of native ability. It simple determines how one conveys, internalizes, receives and analyzes information. As we move toward a culturally pluralistic educational system that seeks common values, language and cultural concensus, it would seem that our assessment tools must begin to recognize cognitive style as a vital area for teachers to master. We will be unable to teach people effectively if we do not even understand how they learn, and the sometimes elliptical means they will use to communicate with us.

The implications of cultural pluralism for teachers are enormous and largely unstated. Teachers will need to find means to develop learning environments that are supportive and responsive to very different individuals. The judgmental aspects of education also come into question. How does one evaluate fairly and constructively in a highly pluralistic environment? Clearly, evaluation mechanisms are needed that will reward rather than penalize both analytical and relational thinkers. Teachers will need a deeper grounding in the processes by which people learn, an area teacher education has all but ignored to date. They will need cross cultural sensitivity and skills, an area that has been similarly ignored in the education of teachers. Our problems in teacher education are all the more complex, since our thinking must encompass the needs not only of those moving toward careers in classrooms, but also those already in place. The veterans are coping, either self taught or without critical skills they need. Thus staff development is at least as vital as teacher education, if we are to address our educational needs effectively.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with two Chinese proverbs. "May you live in interesting times." We do. And in this we are fortunate, for our immigrant populations bring to us classically "American" values. A work ethic, a sound family structure, a desire to achieve and, most importantly, a desire to become part of, not to change America, are all clearly evident among all of today's immigrants. But how do we build one cohesive people out of our diversity? The Chinese say that "If you do not know where you are going---any road will get you there." Educators will have to analyze our challenges with more realism and candor. We must structure programs more creatively for the future rather than times past, if we are to find the educational path that will take us to the next century as a cohesive, literate, complete nation.

Thank you.

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